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1965/02/04

Mr Bundy

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Saigon, Vietnam
4 February 1965

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By lhw, NARS, Date 5-14-76

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Evacuation of Dependents; Lunch, Taylor-Johnson-Bundy-McNaughton-Herfurt

Max and Alex at lunch with Mac and me today expressed the following views regarding the evacuation of dependents:

1. Until the past few weeks, when mob action and anti-American sentiment have become more menacing, they did not favor the evacuation of dependents at all. They did not and do not favor evacuation because of any risks incident to US reprisal actions; this because they believe the risks in such a case to be quite small. They both favor evacuation now, however, because of the new dangers from mob action.

2. They are very concerned about the psychological impact that evacuation of US dependents will have especially in Saigon. They describe the climate in Saigon as irritable and paranoid, with the "fabric stretched tight." There would be suspicions, despite our declarations that we are clearing the decks, that we are actually preparing to bug out -- or, inconsistently, that we anticipate air attacks on Saigon and are removing our loved ones to safe havens. They see the "seeds of panic" in Saigon if the US evacuates dependents.

3. They described the best context for removing dependents as one in which we are initiating "Phase II" and increasing the US forces in Vietnam. (Initiation of Phase II, they say, requires a government here that is "at least able to breathe.") An acceptable, but soon thin, context would be a reprisal. Absent even one military action to buttress our verbal explanation for the evacuation, they believe that we need a combination of two things -- (a) a minimal Vietnamese Government which can help sell the "clearing-the-decks" interpretation and (b) increases in US forces by a number exceeding the number of dependents evacuated. (Even this, they say, would only partially reduce the psychological damage.)

4. They fear that we may too soon find ourselves in the worst possible case -- one in which we must evacuate after anti-American demonstrations and serious mob threats against US citizens. They foresee such demonstrations and want the dependents already to have been removed.

5. They reject as undesirable the idea of keeping wives here while evacuating children. They would not allow working wives to stay. They report that there is unanimity in the mission on this point.

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6. They think action should be taken now to stop the flow of dependents. Furthermore, they see some merit in closing the dependents' school as of this coming fall. It might be announced this spring; perhaps the building could be used for a hospital.

John T. McNaughton



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